

ROHLEDER | Junior guard does it all as walk-on mechanical engineering major



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

Junior guard **Brian Rohleder** guards Texas guard **Demarcus Holland** before Texas inbounds during the Wildcats' 57-61 loss to the Longhorns last Saturday in Bramlage Coliseum.

CONTINUED FROM TIPOFF 3

"I said, 'Yeah, sure, of course,'" Brian said. "So I kind of came in the last two months of construction trying to help finish up before the season started. Basically, I just did what I could do to help. I was working with the construction documents, keeping them up-to-date because they're changing all the time. Aside from that I was just helping the other engineers out and doing what I can."

Even being as busy as he is, Brian has found time not to just be on the K-State men's basketball team, but to make his own mark for the Wildcats.

This season, the junior has seen time as a starter and is playing important minutes in big games, including Wednesday's 76-72 loss to West Vir-

ginia. Earlier in the year, he spearheaded a 20-point victory over Savannah State by taking three-consecutive offensive charges in the opening half.

According to Brian, major playing time is not something he expects, but it's a challenge he's willing to accept. "Being a walk-on, you don't expect to get a lot of playing time," Brian said. "You just come to practice with the same mentality of getting better as the team gets better and getting ready for the next game. Coach (Weber) knows what he's going to get out of me. So maybe sometimes when we need a little consistency, or if we need somebody to work hard and go play defense, he's been more comfortable with putting me in there."

Brian's coaches aren't the only ones who enjoy see-

ing his hustle and energy. He's quickly become a fan favorite among K-State supporters who love watching the intensity he brings to the court.

"It just carries over from practice, I think," Brian said. "I definitely like to be an energy guy, keeping people's spirits up. Make a play, everybody loves to see those hustle plays where people are diving on the floor for a loose ball or taking a charge or getting stop or a big rebound. I think those plays make a difference and I see those plays as my goal."

The six-time Big 12 Commissioner's Honor Roll honoree still does it right in a time where so many do it wrong. Brian Rohleder may not fill stat sheets or scouting reports, but he's shown that hard work pays dividends both on and off the court in substantial ways.

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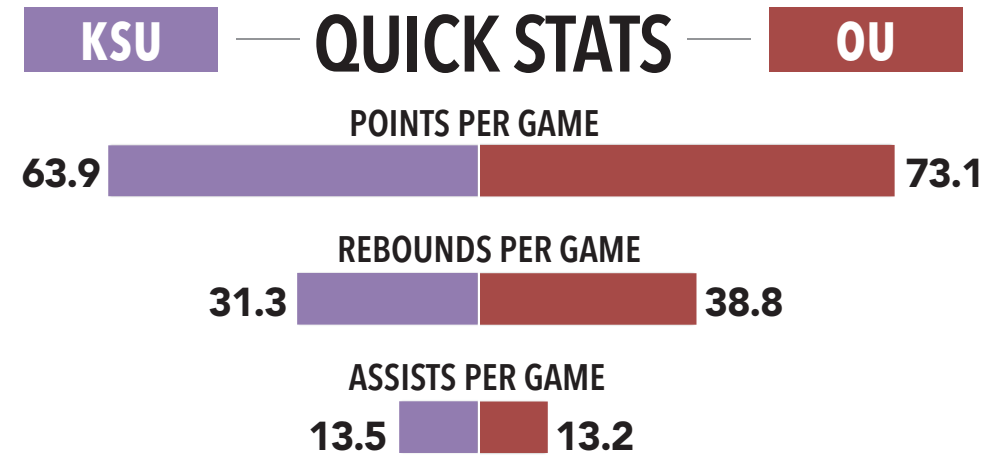
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K-State hopes to end recent heartbreak on Valentine's Day

By EMILIO RIVERA
THE COLLEGIAN

Four weeks ago, K-State traveled to Norman, Oklahoma and upset the then-No. 16-ranked Oklahoma Sooners on the road in the middle of a wild 10-day stretch that saw the Wildcats claw to the top of the Big 12.

For some, that game feels like it happened just yesterday. In reality, it's been a long month since then. The Wildcats (12-13, 5-7) have gone 3-6 since the game in Norman, dropping five-straight games for the first time since February 2005.

Meanwhile, No. 17 Oklahoma (17-7, 8-4), has been trending in the opposite direction. The Sooners have gone 6-3 since the overtime loss to K-State, including a five-game winning streak that has boosted them into second place in the Big 12.

During the streak, Oklahoma is averaging a 19-point margin of victory. Their 45-point trouncing of Texas Tech certainly helped, but the Sooners have four of the five games by double digits and the fifth by eight points to Oklahoma State.

The Sooners enter Saturday's matchup fighting for a chance to extend their streak and maintain close distance to Kansas atop the standings. K-State is simply fighting to stay above .500.

K-State's defense will be tested by the Sooners, who are led by the conference's leading scorer and two of its best 3-point shooters. Junior guard Buddy Hield has been phenomenal on the season averaging 17.6 points and 2.8 3-pointers per game. In the first meeting against K-State, Hield finished with 31 points, 20 of which came in the opening half.

Hield and company pose a significant threat to the Wildcat defense, which is the third-worst in the conference at guarding long-range shots and the second-worst field goal de-



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

Junior forward **Nino Williams** shoots a layup during the second half of the Wildcats' 72-66 victory over the No. 25 Oklahoma Sooners on Jan. 14, 2014 in Bramlage Coliseum.

fense. On the season, the Wildcats have allowed opposing teams to shoot 33 percent from behind the arc and 45 percent from the field overall.

K-State will look to the leadership and recent form of senior forward Nino Williams. Williams followed up his team-leading 13-point performance in the loss to Texas last Saturday by tying a career high with 22 points to lead all scorers against West Virginia on Wednesday night.

Williams has been the most consistent player for the Wildcats when completely healthy and has been able to shoot the ball consistently with a shooting percent slightly above 50 percent. Williams is also the first Wildcat to make 100 field goals this season, breaking the century mark on a layup with 2:25 remaining in the game against the Mountaineers.

CONTINUED ON TIPOFF 3,
"OKLAHOMA"

Pay heed: Kansas' Big 12 dominance isn't a negative for the conference



EMILIO RIVERA
THE COLLEGIAN

While the Big 12 has a long and winding road to go until a regular season champion is crowned, all signs point to No. 8 Kansas as the team to beat in the conference.

Surprise, surprise: the team with 10-straight conference titles is the favorite to win it all again down the stretch. The streak has lasted so long that Lawrence may turn on itself the day Kansas isn't crowned Big 12 champions.

The last time that happened was 2003, 12 years ago under guidance of first-year head coach Bill Self.

It's safe to say Self has steered the Jayhawks in the right direction since then. Wait, no, an unbelievable direction, including a career 345-73 record at Kansas and a decade of dominance in what many believe is, yearly, one of the top conferences in the country.

To illustrate that dominance, or add insult to injury for the rest of the Big 12, depending on which way you see it, Kansas is 160-33 in conference play since 2003. K-State would need to add up all its conference victories since the Tom Asbury-era starting in 1990 to reach 160 conference wins.

With the way Kansas has handled itself over the last 11 years, the question has become whether or not the Jayhawks' overwhelming success is a good thing for the Big 12.

The simple answer is yes. Every conference has at least one powerhouse program in every sport. In basketball, the ACC has Duke and North Carolina; the SEC has Kentucky; the Pac-12 has UCLA and the Big 10 has Ohio State and Michigan State. Kansas is that team for the Big 12.

With Kansas ranked at the top of the conference and among the elite in the country, Big 12 teams have the chance to grab

statement wins against the Jayhawks in order to considerably improve their resumes.

For example, voters ranked Oklahoma State No. 21 in the country after beating the Jayhawks a week after showing up unranked in top 25. Wins against Baylor and Texas helped, yes, but a win against Self's Jayhawks is a major statement.

Like it or not, Kansas is the big mammoth of a man sitting in the corner of the bar who everyone — drunkly — wants to fight to “prove themselves.” Losing is expected, certainly, but competing is rewarded nonetheless.

But back to basketball. When a team manages to do the herculean task of usurping Kansas at the top of the conference, they get rewarded. This is rightly deserved, because it rarely happens.

The last time Kansas failed to win the conference was in 2003-04. The Jayhawks' “down year” saw them finish in a tie for second place with Texas behind Oklahoma State. That year, the Longhorns and Cowboys snagged top-three seedings in the NCAA Tournament.

Coaches come and go in

Lawrence, but winning never stops. Some of the most well-known coaches in the history of college basketball — Forest Clare Allen, Larry Brown, Roy Williams and now Self — have walked through the same tunnel at Allen Fieldhouse, and they all have led Kansas to impressive feats.

If you missed the message: Kansas will always be good. The Big 12 spectrum is those near the basement and a handful of times duking it out in the middle of the standings — and then Kansas at the top.

Programs at the bottom and middle change, but Kansas, the benchmark of excellence in the Big 12, remains firmly seated at its throne at the top.

If the Jayhawks succeed and win their 11th-straight Big 12 regular season title this season, it is something positive for the Big 12 ... mainly because it sends a huge message to everyone else: “come and get us.”

Emilio Rivera is a sophomore in mass communications. Please send all comments to sports@kstatecollegian.com



PARKER ROBB | THE COLLEGIAN

Kansas head coach **Bill Self** applauds his team in the first half of K-State's 85-82 overtime upset victory over the No. 7-ranked Jayhawks in the 27th Sunflower Showdown on Feb. 10, 2014 in Bramlage Coliseum.

K-State vs. Oklahoma pregame: Q&A with The Oklahoman's Ryan Aber

By TATE STEINLAGE
THE COLLEGIAN

K-State and No. 17 Oklahoma meet Saturday for the second time this season. The Wildcats knocked off the Sooners in the first installment last month in overtime thanks in part to two big shots from sophomore guard Marcus Foster.

To preview Saturday's clash, the K-State Collegian sports desk sat down with The Oklahoman's Sooners beat writer, Ryan Aber.

Collegian: Ryan Spangler has enjoyed success against K-State this season and in years past. What about his play allows him to dominate teams like the Wildcats, and what have you seen from him over the last few games?

Ryan Aber: I'll start with the last part — he's been fantastic over the last few games. Spangler has had probably his most consistent stretch of solid play on both ends of the floor during this recent five-game winning streak for the Sooners. He sets the tone for this team with his physical, tireless play and he's been at his best of late including a 14-point, 12-rebound performance in Monday's win over Iowa State.

As for why he's matched up well against the Wildcats, I think it comes down to matchups. He can be a difficult guard since he's got size and can pound inside with big guys but he also has some range and quickness that he can take advantage of away from the basket.

Collegian: Oklahoma had just two bench players play against K-State in January's clash, combining for just five points. The Sooner bench has been quiet several times this season, yet the starting five has proven to come through time and time again. Is that a worry for head coach Lon Kruger? If K-State is able to hold two or three



Ryan Aber

starters in check, should the Sooners be worried?

Aber: It is a bit of a worry but things are looking a bit brighter since then. Starting on the interior Oklahoma's big freshman forward Khadeem Lattin has been much more consistent of late. Lattin isn't going to add much in the way of scoring but he can bang around a bit on the glass and is an effective shot blocker.

On the perimeter, Frank Booker turned in his best game of the season Monday in the win over the Cyclones with 14 points. Booker went through an extended cold stretch from the outside vary in conference play but is rounding into form there. That being said, Oklahoma lives and dies with its starters. If the Wildcats can keep a couple of those Sooners' starters in check, things get dicey, especially if Buddy Hield is one of the struggling starters. Generally, as Hield goes so goes Oklahoma's offense.

Collegian: Buddy Hield was firing on all cylinders in the first meeting, finishing with 31 points on 11-20 shooting, including 20 points in the first half. However, in the final 20 minutes, K-State used the length of Wesley Iwundu to slow down Hield's production. Do you see K-State sticking with the length vs. Hield matchup Saturday?

Aber: There's the Hield mention and it's a big one. I think K-State's best bet would be to go with a matchup like that against Hield and force Oklahoma to

work to get Hield open through significant ball movement or make other guys hit shots. As good as Isaiah Cousins and Jordan Woodard have been offensively on the perimeter, neither can do the kinds of things Buddy Hield does. Those guys are capable of helping the Sooners win games but neither is as consistent as Hield.

For that to be effective, though, K-State has to protect the ball on offense and keep the Sooners from breaking out into transition. That's where Hield has done a lot of damage this season.

Collegian: Outside of Hield and Spangler, who has to be Oklahoma's X-Factor Saturday?

Aber: Isaiah Cousins. Cousins has been Oklahoma's best defender for much of the last two seasons, though Hield and Woodard have improved greatly this season. But he's made a tremendous stride forward offensively this year becoming one of the top 3-point shooters in this league. He's had a bit of a rough patch recently shooting the ball, coinciding with a wrist injury he suffered against Baylor last month. But he broke through a bit Monday. If he can hit a couple shots and take some pressure off of Buddy Hield, that could go a long way toward getting things going for Oklahoma.

Collegian: Which matchup should folks be paying attention to?

Aber: Nino Williams versus whoever he's paired with on the other side, Ryan Spangler or TaShawn Thomas. Williams can be a load to handle in there and both Spangler and Thomas, though they've improved, have shown some vulnerabilities.

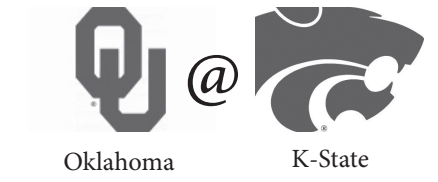
On the other end of the floor, it figures to be Oklahoma's inside guys who can take advantage of some matchup problems. Spangler with his ability to draw things away from the rim and Thomas with his recent ball movement in helping find Oklahoma's guards good looks as things move through the post, then his ability to finish off his teammates' misses.

PICK 'EM

WEEK 4

The crew lines up to pick the winners and losers of the week

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Voice of the Wildcats

8-7

Brian Rohleder: Seminal student-athlete

By TIMOTHY EVERSON
THE COLLEGIAN

Talk has been rampant in the past several years on whether or not the “student-athlete” exists anymore.

Seemingly lost behind the television deals, one-and-done players and the celebrity-like title that comes with being a player on someone's favorite college basketball team, is that schools like Kentucky or Kansas are still academic institutions of higher learning.

Redshirt junior Brian Rohleder is one of the few examples left of a player from years past. A student who happens to be an athlete rather than an athlete who happens to be a student.

Rohleder was asked to walk on by former K-State head coach Frank Martin's staff in 2011 after his senior season at Bishop Carroll High School in Wichita, Kansas.

Following his brother, former K-State football player Kevin Rohleder (2007-10), Brian took Martin's offer and declared a major in mechanical engineering.

Having picked a major that is extremely involved, Brian soon learned that his work load was going to be large, and that he was going to have find discipline to have success both on the court and in the “engineering building” at Rathbone Hall.

“It's definitely a lot of time management,” Brian said. “I can't take whatever time I do have off. Any time I do have is usually set aside for homework or studying or stuff like that. For instance, on the trip to Morgantown on Tuesday, I was doing homework on the plane, and I'll probably do homework on the way back too. I'm in my fourth year now, so I've kind of gone through the process and I know what I'm going to do. It's just making sure you don't waste time. Definitely the teachers have been very helpful, just making sure I get everything that I missed. I mean, it's hard but it's doable.”

It was his major that afforded him the opportunity of an internship at G.E. Johnson Construction, the company responsible for building the West Stadium Center and the in-progress Vanier complex. Brian has had a hand in both projects.

“I got to know the CEO of

G.E. Johnson,” Brian said. “He went with the team on a trip to Brazil three summers ago. Coach Weber mentioned to him that I'm an engineering major and so we just got to talking a little bit and he wanted to know if I wanted to work with him the next summer because they were going to be starting the project then.”

CONTINUED ON TIPOFF 4,
“ROHLEDER”

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OKLAHOMA | Foster, Harris to play against Sooners Saturday

CONTINUED FROM TIPOFF 1

While Williams has been able to elevate his game in the most recent pair of games, no other player has been able to consistently score. Freshman guard Tre Harris shot 7-14 against Texas Tech and Texas before being held scoreless against West Virginia and sophomore Brandon Bolden has put in productive minutes, but neither have threatened to take over games on a consistent basis.

One of the biggest factors affecting the Wildcats' chances against the Sooners will be the status of sophomore guard Marcus Foster. Foster, who was suspended alongside freshman forward Malek Harris before the Texas Tech game for violating team rules, hasn't seen the court in three

games. He and Harris did travel to Morgantown on Wednesday, though, and are expected to play against Oklahoma Saturday according to reports.

Without Foster, K-State has struggled to make up for his production offensively. Junior transfer Justin Edwards has stepped up, as well as senior forward Thomas Gipson, but Foster's 14 points per game have not been able to be replicated in the last three contests.

However, K-State was able to eclipse the 60-point mark for the first time since Foster and Harris' suspension began, and 70 points for the first time since the loss at Iowa State on Jan. 20.

Tipoff on Saturday between K-State and Oklahoma is set for 7 p.m. from Bramlage Coliseum.

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